

Resilient Life 2-sermon series C Proper 15b Hebrews passage is in lection for ABC Holy Week, which is not a good fit for this material.	Living a Resilient Life - 2 Hebrews 12.1-4 by Tim Isbell	Preached 3/11/2007
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Thesis: Three more important building blocks of a resilient life are living free from the past, train to go the distance, and run in the company of a happy few.

Primary source for this message is A Resilient Life, and to a lesser extent The Life God Blesses, both by Gordon MacDonald.

Setup

I held up a can of WD40 (yep, I mean the lubricant), and asked the congregation:

Do you recognize this? ... they did.

What does WD stand for? ... Answer: "Water displacement"

What does the "40" stand for? ... Answer: They failed in the first 39 attempts to formulate it.

A man in his 50s wrote a manuscript for a book

- sent it to several publishers w/o success – so discouraged that he threw it in waste basket. His wife tried to salvage manuscript, but he told her sternly: "We've wasted enough time on it. I forbid you to remove it from the wastebasket!"

Still, she decided to show the manuscript to at least one more publisher. When she arrived at that publisher's office, she pulled out the most unusual looking item the publisher ever received. Underneath a wrapping of brown paper was a waste basket still holding the writer's manuscript. This way she was not technically going against her husband's wishes. She did not remove the manuscript from the wastebasket—the publisher did it for her. When he read it, he loved it.

The writer: Norman Vincent Peale - The Power of Positive Thinking. Sold 30M copies.

This is 2nd of a mini-series on Living the Resilient Life.

When a resilient Christian experiences a major defeat or disappointment, they...

- Don't crumble,
- Don't whine about their victim-hood,

- Don't get bitter,
- Don't quit.

When we are shell-shocked by a major blow, they...

- Continue trusting God, aware of his over-riding goodness
- Serve God with whatever energy and resources we still have, remembering that Christ was resurrected, and they will be, too,
- Experience God's presence as we endure – and it is always enough.

If we live through the blow, we come out spiritually stronger. If we don't live through it, we leave a precious witness for God.

Last week I unpacked 2 building blocks:

1. *Commitment to finish strong.*
2. *Keeping the big picture in mind.*

Today, 3 more.

#3. Run free of the past

(I used stories from A Resilient Life by Gordon MacDonald. Pages indicated below identify the location.)

Gordon MacDonald asked a 93 year old man if he and his 90 year old wife ever have conflict.

He answered, "Yes."

(pg 107f). How do you treat each other then?

"It is important to speak tenderly to her."

Like this morning when we were driving. She rolled through a stop sign. A few minutes later I said to her, "Honey, later on when there's a better time, I have a thought for you."

Then later on: "Honey, I love you very much, but this morning when you rolled through that stop sign it bothered me enough that I wanted to bring it up."

Why is speaking like this so important?

"Because when she was a girl, her father always spoke to her in a harsh and hurtful tone. Whenever she hears any man speak in an angry manner, the feelings of hurt and fear return." (Similar material is also available in The Life God Blesses, c7, also written by Gordon MacDonald)

Things from very early in life, the first 10 years, impact us throughout life. Unless we deal with them gently, they will run our lives.

Twins own a store (page 124ff)

MacDonald attributes this story to John Claypool.

2 twins grew up together: same schools, clothes, activities. Eventually their dad died and

the twins took over family business, a store.

They were the envy of town because they worked so well together, and their business prospered.

One day a customer made a purchase for \$1. A brother put the dollar on top of cash register and walked customer to door. A while later he remembered that he'd left the \$1 on the cash register and went to ring up the purchase.

It was gone. He asked his brother if he'd rung it up. "No, I haven't seen \$1."

"That's funny, I distinctly remember putting the \$1 there and nobody has come into the store since."

An hour later, this time with a note of suspicion in his voice, the brother asked again, "Are you sure you didn't see that dollar bill and put it in the register?" His brother was quick to catch the note of accusation and flared back in defensive anger.

That was the beginning of breach of trust. It grew. A wall was erected to divide store into 2. Their thriving business became 2 struggling competitive stores. Each brother enlisted allies for himself against the other.

This went on for 20 years. One day a car with an out-of-state license drove up. A well-dressed man got out, went into one of the stores and inquired how long store had been there.

The brother answered, "Over 20 years." So the man said, "Then I know with whom I must settle." He went on to tell how about 20 years ago he was a drifter, moving from town to town, with no money and little to eat. As he was walking down the alley behind store he saw dollar bill on top of cash register. Everyone else was in the front of the store. "I had been raised a Christian, never stole anything before – but that morning I was so hungry that I gave in to temptation. That act has bothered me ever since and I decided that I'd never find peace until I made it right."

The storekeeper, now an aging man, began to shake and weep uncontrollably. Eventually gained control and said to stranger, "Please go next door and repeat the same story you just told me."

The stranger did, this time there were 2 old men, who looked remarkably alike, both weeping uncontrollably.

People generally use 3 ways to deal w/ their past (pg 117f):

1. Accept the burden and get used to it.

And it usually eats away at them, like it ate away at the twin brothers.

2. Try to blow it off.

Determine to live only in present, or perhaps the future. It's called denial. Works for a while.

3. Repair it.

Resilient people face the reality of their sins, mistakes, experiences. Resilient people

learn from them and move forward better people.

Repairing the past means facing reality, acknowledging the pain we have caused to others, without making excuses – just owning the reality of the pain caused to others, and to themselves.

Want a tool? One I'm working on myself. ☾

Partition life into 5 year seasons. Fill in each season with the...

- Key people who influenced you - for good or ill.
- Major ideas that guided you - noble or not.
- Critical events that changed you - happy or sad.
- The sin/brokenness in that season.
- Write out a confession to God, ask for forgiveness and redemption, and trust his promise to provide it.

If you have a spiritual growth partner, share it w/ them; ask them to pray for you. (For more on this concept, see [Transforming Partnerships](http://www.IsbellOnline.org) link at www.IsbellOnline.org)

This partitioning process will take time, probably a few weeks for a middle-aged adult.

#4. Train to go the distance.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 (NLT) All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. ²⁶ So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. ²⁷ I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

Train our mind.

Direct our mind to healthy things. (I did a whole sermon series on this topic, it's called Healthy Thinking. It was 5 weeks long and started 10/4/2009. If you want the notes to this series, contact Tim through my website. At some point I'll get this Healthy Thinking series posted on the website, but it's not up there yet.)

Become a lifetime learner.

Follow the arts, know what the writers are saying. Read things you do not agree with, as well as those you do.

Talk less, ask more questions, and listen more.

Train our body.

Physical fitness. Watch what you eat, exercise, etc.

Invite God to feed our soul.

Make a quiet time often – several times a week.

Read Scripture and devotional material.

Worship in a local church.

Serve the needy, at least sometimes in secret.

If we are married, we owe it our spouse to live with a filled-up soul; we owe our kids a parent living with a filled-up soul.

And if we have a ministry we owe the people we minister to minister living out of a filled-up soul.

Prepare for emergencies.

Pre- decide that when we feel our emotions stir, we will take action!

#5. Run in the company of a happy few.

Note the descriptor “Happy.” We can minister to complainers, angry people, needy people, but we must run with a happy few.

We need some of our same gender; if you are a couple then find some happy couples to run with, too.

These “happy few” need to transcend co-workers.

These need to be 2-way; where we give and receive.

Some people are far too consumed with care-giving – they are just obsessed with solving other people’s problems.

But somewhere in every healthy life needs to be a happy few that we run with, have fun with, linger with, pray with.

Tell MacDonald’s cross country story. Pg. 12f

1-3-3 marathon running team strategy: 1 is best runner who sets pace. The 3’s are grouped because they have similar running skills; they get their pace from the 1 runner.

John was the lead runner for Gordon’s high school team. John was a mature athlete, quiet spirited, dependable, hardworking. The other 6 respected him.

Each fall, at the Van Courtland Park in the Bronx, the race was on, John was leading, Gordon MacDonald’s cluster of 3 was running about 40 yards behind John on winding trails through the woods.

They came around a bend and were dumbfounded to come upon John walking. Walking is the worst possible thing a cross country runner can do.

One of the cluster immediately slowed down and started walking with John.

The other two lost their pace and finished poorly.

John had some sort of psychological block on that particular course; this happened another year, too.

We run the race of life in clusters like this

But the “Number 1” setting the pace for us is Jesus Christ. He will not stumble. He will not walk. He will set a good pace.

Listen to Hebrews 12:1-4 ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. ³ Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. ⁴ After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

Cinderella Man...

Tells the true story of boxing legend James J. Braddock (Russell Crowe), who made an incredible comeback during the Great Depression. Injured and arthritic, Braddock's promising career was cut short, and he had to go on public assistance when he couldn't get work at the docks in New Jersey. But when an opportunity came for him to get back in the ring—and provide for his family—he took it, and his world changed.

Now fighting with a purpose, Braddock starts winning fight after fight. He inspires the struggling nation with his perseverance in the midst of hardship. As his comeback builds steam, he keeps remembering the faces of his children and his wife and how important it is for him to provide for them. Finally, Braddock wins his way into a showdown with the World Heavyweight Champion, Max Baer.

Baer, a vicious fighter, is notorious for killing two men in the ring. In the days before the fight he ridicules, threatens, and mocks Braddock, and as the world looks on there is great concern for Braddock's life.

When the big day arrives, Braddock's wife sneaks into the bowels of the arena to find her husband in the locker room just moments before the fight. The look in her eyes sends everyone else from the room, and she marches straight up to Braddock. With a tender fierceness that can only come from a loyal wife, she locks her husband in her stare for the final words he'll hear before the big event.

"So you just remember who you are," she says. "You're the Bulldog of Bergen, and the Pride of New Jersey. You're everybody's hope, and the kids' hero. And you are the champion of my heart, James J. Braddock."

Remembering who we are truly makes all the difference. Braddock wins the fight.

Other resources:

Click on the link for the [Google Slides](#) for this sermon. (Similar to PowerPoint)

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